

BROOKLINE COMMISSION FOR WOMEN
MINUTES OF THE MEETING
WEDNESDAY AUGUST 5TH, 7 PM
(ONLINE VIA ZOOM)

Commissioners Present: Rebecca Stone, Meenakshi Garodia, Liz Stillman, Nicole McClelland, Hadassah Margolis, Felina Silver Robinson, Homa Sarabi (not yet sworn in)

Commissioners Absent: Gloria Rudisch

Also present:

Meg Hitchcock, Alex Noble (BHS students), Sarah Kaplan (ODICR staff)

A quorum being present, Ms. Stone called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

1. Review of the Calendar: Relevant dates for the commission have not changed. Next meeting will be Sept. 2nd, 2020.
2. Vote to approve minutes from meeting of July 7, 2020: Moved by Ms. Stillman, seconded by Ms. Garodia, passes unanimously.
3. Update on Women Who Inspire Us video: Final draft readied by Daniella Kaplan and Ms. Sarabi will consult with Daniella and help clean it up. Ms. Sarabi praised the work done by Ms. Kaplan. Ms. Stillman says Ms. Kaplan will appreciate the help. Ms. Stone thanks all who have collaborated. Video will be done in the next few weeks.
4. Discussion with Alex Noble and Meg Hitchcock of BHS #MeToo: Ms. Stone turned the conversation over to Ms. Margolis to facilitate the discussion. Ms. Margolis asked Meg and Alex to describe the project. Ms. Hitchcock states we started project late this spring after an outcry on social media about BHS students and sexually aggressive behavior. One male student was named on social media as an aggressor. They decided to collect more information and invited the BHS community to tell stories (supposed to be anonymous). They received a lot of stories, including from some who described reporting incidents and having no follow-up from the administration. Ms. Noble felt the administration was not communicating well or taking them seriously at first. Spoke with a parent who had had a similar negative experience, saying there seemed to be a lack of trust and willingness to listen.

Ms. Noble and Ms. Hitchcock gathered 8 people to present the administration with collected information including personal stories, collections of facts and data. One month later, they described dramatic progress. They are encouraged by recent actions to address various issues they've raised and to change the culture at the school. They praised Dean Uttaro for her responsiveness in particular, saying she wants to help them, beginning with creating a student/teacher committee SHARP (Sexual Harrassment & Assault Response & Prevention) to drive changes, such as developing lesson plans for Advisories, doing

presentations at PSB middle school grades, and working to revamp the sex education curriculum.

Asked to say more about the “culture of inaction at BHS and the elementary schools” they talked about, the students described a student bringing a Title IX complaint having to take notes on the process because the school did not have Title IX materials to give to students, urging complainant students to present “in hypotheticals,” and seeming to discourage formal reporting of incidents. Students do not have information to advocate for themselves. Ms. McClelland was appalled that there appears to be a lack of written documentation of past reports. Ms. Garodia asked if the complaints were about sex discrimination or assault; the students responded that most of the stories they collected were about student-on-student assault or harassment, although some had talked about “uncomfortable” interactions between teachers and staff. Ms. McClelland asked if Ms. Noble and Ms. Hitchcock have documentation of reported cases that the school had not documented, but they explained that the stories they received were anonymous so there was no way to know how many reports may have gone undocumented. They cited one known case where a student had obtained a restraining order against a fellow student stemming from events at BHS, but that even that case did not show up in school records.

Asked who in the schools they have spoken with to date, Ms. Noble and Hitchcock reported they have spoken with the Title IX coordinators at BHS and in the PSB administration and with Social Worker Abby Dean. They have not spoken to anyone in the elementary schools. Ms. Stone is disturbed that reports were made and not appropriately documented. Ms. Noble and Hitchcock added that they believe there is no protection of students who come forward. The student who obtained the restraining order, for example, was told to alter their schedule to avoid their alleged attacker rather than the other way around. They cited this as contributing to a toxic culture that a small amount of effort could fix.

The SHARP coalition is poised to make that effort. Ms. Noble and Hitchcock described plans to post Title IX definitions and procedures in bathrooms. Flow charts will describe BLESS (what you do when someone discloses to you). They also hope to hold workshops with parents on how to engage with students around these topics and develop targeted info for sports teams. Ms. Stone said she hoped the bathroom definitions will include the definition of consent. Dean Uttaro’s husband is also school staff with experience in this area and wants to be part of SHARP’s approach to boys. Ms. Stone asked if this is being coordinated with LGBTQ groups as well. Ms. Hitchcock and Ms. Noble have met with Ms. Leslie the GSA coordinator.

Discussion turned to the sex education curriculum. Ms. Garodia asked about the current curriculum. Ms. Noble and Hitchcock recalled their own experiences in middle school as a bunch of diagrams to be labelled and discussion of marijuana. Ms. Hitchcock, at Pierce, said police officers came to talk about not texting explicit photos. Both recalled a heavy emphasis on abstinence. There was a conversation about consent in 7th grade, but there is no curriculum after 9th grade. Ms. Noble further points out that the curriculum is only about abstinence. Ms. Stillman reminded the commission that there is no state

requirement for sex education. Ms. McClelland asked whether it was possible to bring in experts to the schools? Ms. Stone responds that we can do that on an ad hoc basis but can't install our own choice of curriculum. For non-mandated curriculum like sex education and drug education, school districts look at cost. One reason drug education is taught by police officers is because the federal grants for drug prevention go to the police, not the schools. Ms. Stone believes the most direct way to influence sex education is through the Wellness committee, a state-mandated committee. She believes that it has expanded from looking mostly at nutrition/school lunches to include physical activity in the school day. Ms. Stone advises Ms. Noble and Ms. Hitchcock to bring their ideas about curriculum reforms to that committee and/or the curriculum sub-committee of the School Committee. Ms. Stone spoke with SC Member Barbara Scotto and she is happy to help with that.

Ms. Sarabi stated that the students have done amazing work and asks what can we, as the BCW, do? What would be helpful? Ms. Noble asks what power/influence we have as the BCW. Ms. Stone says we are a part of the government, empowered to represent women. We can go with you to speak, we can testify, we can make phone calls, we can host events about this. We can amplify your voices and we can be credentialing organization for you. We can write to the school committee. We will stand with you, or behind you as a go-between and an amplifier.

Ms. McClelland suggests that we may be able as a commission to bring a warrant article to town meeting about sex education. Ms. Stone clarified that Town Meeting cannot mandate actions for the schools, but could have a resolution in support of an action. She suggested that the coming November TM will be overloaded and such a resolution might not get the attention it deserves. Ms. Margolis suggested that we could do other things now and lead up to a resolution next May. Commissioners discussed various ideas for community events and education. Ms. Stillman cautioned that anything done in the schools required CORI checks of all volunteers who would interact with students and urged keeping efforts at a broader community level. Staff member Sarah Kaplan, the town ADA coordinator, urged the students and commissioners not to forget about children with disabilities because they are uniquely vulnerable and treated as if they are asexual, especially children with intellectual disabilities. They are often exploited. Ms. Kaplan is happy to talk to the SHARP group about this.

Ms. Stone says we will follow the lead of Ms. Noble and Ms. Hitchcock, asking if maybe a BCW member could be part of the SHARP coalition that is being formed. We can also use our platform to advertise and amplify any events to get more community-wide attention. The students said the immediate next step is to form SHARP with the goal to have up to 40 students and teachers. Ms. Stillman volunteered to help with SHARP based on prior sex crimes prosecutor experience. Ms. Margolis will be the lead commissioner on this for now, staying in touch with Ms. Noble and Ms. Hitchcock on our behalf. Ms. McClelland suggests that we need to decide if we will do a TM resolution tonight because the article would have to be submitted for the warrant by September 3rd. Ms. Stone said we should discuss that later during the agenda item about subcommittees.

5. Continued Review & Discussion of Planning Documents, with possible votes, as follows:

- i. Mission, Core Values, and Work of the BCW – Ms. Stone referred to a revised proposal (See Appendix A) for discussion and vote. She thanked Ms. Margolis and Ms. Sarabi for helping to improve the language around inclusion. The mission statement now includes “all who identify as female.” Inclusion was taken out of the core values since it is explicitly in the mission statement. Instead a core value on Gender Justice has been added. The explanatory language comes from Third Wave. Discussion: Ms. Garodia asked if we could replace “safe and equal treatment” with “ensure equal and safe treatment”. Not sure what “safe treatment” means, so Ms. Stone proposes that we change “safe” to “safety” and re-punctuate. Ms. Garodia asks (under statements What We Do) why we support only struggling women; wishes it reflected supporting all women. Ms. Stone said that started with focusing on women struggling economically; other commissioners agreed it was important to recognize and distinguish women who struggle with hardships of many sorts. Consensus to leave language as it is. Motion to adopt with “safety” amendment made by Ms. Stillman, seconded by Ms. Garodia. Ms. Garodia adds that this should go on our social media and other outlets. Ms. Stone agrees. Passes unanimously.
- ii. BCW Structure – Proposed Subcommittees and Liaisons: Ms. Stone explained that creating subcommittees can help the BCW organize ourselves and our work, and also provides more opportunities on the commission for leadership. The subcommittees would advance work between our regular commission meetings. Our monthly meetings would then have sub-committee reports. The BCW Chair will make subcommittee appointments annually after consultation with members about their preferences.

Ms. Stone explained that standing subcommittees were subject to the Open Meeting Law: a) they cannot have more members than would constitute a quorum of the BCW; and b) work can be done, but a quorum of a subcommittee cannot deliberate/debate/decide anything outside of a posted meeting. Ms. Kaplan reminded us that agendas will need to be posted in advance as well.

Ms. Stone thanked Ms. Stillman and Ms. Silver Robinson for their work looking at other Commissions on the Status of Women (CSWs) and Brookline commissions/boards for how this might be done. Referred to proposal (see Appendix B) and explained the 3 proposed standing Subcommittees follow the “what we do” part of our mission just voted on: Legislation and Advocacy, Community Supports, and Celebrations.

As described on the proposal, the biggest annual task for the Legislation and Advocacy subcommittee would be the Town Meeting warrant article review. Community Supports Subcommittee would oversee projects such as the Dress for Success coat drive and proposed projects on hosting virtual gatherings for women during COVID. The Celebrations subcommittee could also involve non-

Commissioners as members who wish to help with those events. Ms. Kaplan will let us know if non-commissioner subcommittee members can vote and whether they would count towards a quorum? Ms. Stone said she would check this with town counsel as well.

Other work of the commission, including maintaining a presence across town, can be done with Liaison roles. A BCW liaison would keep track of meetings and agendas of the committee/group to which they are assigned, attend meetings if helpful, gather information, and report back to the BCW. Ms. Stone proposed two liaisons to the School Committee (curriculum and policy), and one each to the Roundtable on Domestic Violence, the public health commission, and the CDICR. We may appoint temporary liaisons to ad hoc committees such as the task forces recently created on policing.

Finally, Ms. Stone proposes having a commissioner for communications and outreach. This work would not entirely be the responsibility of one person, they would just coordinate efforts. Ms. Sarabi asks if we have constraints on our communications, Ms. Stone says the area is murky but ultimately mostly about open meeting law and deliberation. Ms. Margolis moves to approve the new structure, seconded by Ms. Stillman. Ms. Stone clarifies that the process of assigning roles would not be determined at this meeting. Passes unanimously.

6. Possible (new) Community Support Project: Voices of Brookline women/moms during COVID: Ms. Sarabi and Ms. Margolis independently had communicated with Ms. Stone about initiating an event or meeting. Ms. Sarabi was thinking about something on a bi-monthly basis. Ms. Margolis said it was too ambitious to host a true support group, but she was thinking about starting with a single, online, open mic forum for women to talk with and support each other, to get together virtually and discuss how it has been with Covid -- parenting, friendships, this experience, the lack of connection. Important to acknowledge the difficulties of the pandemic time and how it disparately impacts women. Ms. Kaplan suggested collaboration with Women Thriving, a private non-profit in town. Ms. McClelland suggests we might want a facilitator-maybe a community member and we could amplify. Ms. Margolis says we could host with a facilitator, but sees it as very informal get together, not an event with a specific agenda. Ms. Sarabi suggests that we could try to find a facilitator from the participants in the first forum. Ms. Margolis says the Zoom chat feature is useful for participants to have side conversations where they can connect or exchange information with specific others on the call. Ms. Stone said that there seems to be consensus that this conversation should continue, that the BCW can be host or add its brand to something like this. No vote necessary to get this moving, but suggests Ms. Sarabi, Ms. Margolis, and Ms. McClelland talk further about timing, format etc.
7. Request to send a letter in support of MCSW letter to Sen. President and House Speaker requesting permanent changes to remote participation rules under Open Meeting Law (OML): Ms. Stone circulated the MCSW letter and explained that, due to online meeting, more women have been able to attend/participate in CSW (and other) meetings in a

meaningful way. The letter asks to allow relaxed OML rules established for Covid to be made permanent. Ms. McClelland moves, Ms. Robinson seconds, and the motion to send a letter in support passes. Ms. Stone will draft and circulate to other boards and commissions as well.

8. New business: Ms. McClelland reminded us of the need to discuss a possible Town Meeting resolution for statewide comprehensive sex ed because of the timing of the warrant (it closes for new articles on Sept. 2). Ms. Stone pointed out that a resolution at November Town Meeting would fall after the end of the current state legislature's session and suggested developing a Town Meeting resolution for May 2021 instead. Ms. McClelland suggested that in the meantime a letter in support of the current sex education bill would be appropriate. Ms. Stone will work with Ms. McClelland on that letter. Moved by Ms. Stillman, seconded by Ms. Stone, passes unanimously (Ms. Garodia had left the meeting prior to this vote).

The meeting was adjourned at 9:13 p.m.

Appendix A: **Proposal of July 2020, amended. For vote August 5, 2020**

Mission: The mission of the Brookline Commission for Women is to promote equity and justice for all women and girls, including all who identify as female.

Our Core Values:

- Gender Justice: We reject patriarchy, transphobia, and homophobia and work to create a world free from misogyny.
- Intersectionality: We recognize that race, ethnicity, class/income, and gender intersect to compound discrimination against BIPOC women and girls.
- Collaboration: We seek to work with other individuals, committees, and groups in Brookline to address issues of gender inequity.
- Transparency: We act with and in front of the public as an essential part of our work.
- Determination: We know change will happen only if we consistently name, document, and stand up to inequality, discrimination, and aggression against women and girls.

What we do:

We *advocate* on behalf of all women and girls to ensure safe and equal treatment, voice, and participation in Brookline;

We *support* all women and girls who are struggling and who strive for a better life;

We *celebrate* the strength, contributions, and diversity of all women and girls.

Appendix B: **BCW Subcommittees & Liaisons: DRAFT for discussion and vote 8.5.2020**

Liaisons (liaisons will be assigned by the chair each year and serve for 1 year, renewable)

1. Schools/School Committee (2?)
SC Curriculum Subcom (Sex Ed/Health/Healthy Relationships)
SC Policy Subcom (Title IX, Bullying, Discipline; Menstrual products)
2. Roundtable on Domestic Violence/Intimate Partner Violence
3. Commission on Diversity, Inclusion, Cmty Relations
4. Public Health Commission – promoting women’s health; data collection
5. Planning & Econ Dev/Sm Bus Subcommittee on Women- and BIPOC-owned Businesses
6. Ad Hoc/Temporary Liaisons as needed (e.g. Policing Task Forces)

Standing Subcommittees: (based on our three areas of work/”What We Do”)

Each subcommittee will have 3-4 BCW members, of whom one will be Chair. Commissioners should expect to serve on 2 subcommittees. Appointments will be made annually by the BCW Chair, in consultation with commissioners. Subcommittees will meet at least 1/month with meetings subject to the Open Meeting Law.

- 1) Legislation & Advocacy Subcommittee
 - Town meeting warrant article review/recommendations (2x per year)
 - Monitor State legislation e.g. Roe Act, Menstrual Equity, Sex Ed
 - Monitor Local implementation of gender-equity bylaws (Menstrual products; gender-neutral language)
 - Project: Collecting, analyzing and publishing data regarding salary equity in Brookline (ODICR)
 - Project: BHS #MeToo
 - Project: Child care during significant meetings
 - Project: Women’s voices in Town Meeting
- 2) Community Supports Subcommittee
 - Maintain BCW Volunteer Database/List
 - Dress for Success Coat Drive
 - (*Proposed*) Project on women & covid virtual support group
- 3) Celebrations Subcommittee (include non-commissioners?)
 - Woman Who Inspires me essay contest
 - Woman of the Year process
 - Women Who Inspire Us Annual Event

New Commissioner Role: Communications and Outreach Commissioner
Helping strategize and carry out...

- Social media (FB)
- Event communications (Soofi, Brookline TAB etc.)
- Community Outreach strategies to support BCW work